

The Human World and Musical Diversity:

**Proceedings from the Fourth Meeting
of the ICTM Study Group
“Music and Minorities” in Varna,
Bulgaria 2006**

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On Some Early Sonic Evidence of Musical Hybridization: Observations on Commercial Gramophone Recordings from Bulgaria

Ventsislav Dimov

Introduction

This text is a new attempt to outline some tendencies related to musical hybridization in the music found on commercial musical recordings from the first half of the twentieth century.¹ Early recorded music from Bulgaria has not yet been studied in sufficient depth. It is well known that the first gramophone recordings of Bulgarian performers and repertoires were made by foreign representatives of the Gramophone Company (Perkins, Kelly and Ward 1976), in cooperation with local agents and performers, following the strategy employed by the large recording companies at the dawn of the international music industry (Gronow 1996: 82-83).

The materials examined in this paper include accessible catalogs of foreign and Bulgarian gramophone companies; gramophone plates (collections of items from the archive of the Institute of Art Studies at BAS, the Golden Fund at BNR, as well as private collections); and concomitant information (archives, memoirs, materials from the press).

The basic research emphases include: (1) the roles of people from ethnic minorities (Roma, Turks, Jews, and Armenians) and (2) the roles of foreign musicians (Czechs, Croatians, Serbians, and Russians) in the music on early gramophone records in Bulgaria, recorded in the first half of the twentieth century. The paper also focuses on the personal aspects of musical history (the musicians) and the usage of the recorded music (the function). The potential and real hybridism of the recorded music of local performers is also interpreted.

The very nature of mediated music creates the conditions for hybridism. Recorded commercial music is hybrid, since it blends mainstream musical tastes, fashions and commercial interests (the cosmopolitan) with domestic traditions and markets (the local). Recorded music from Bulgaria, which is object of this research, is regionally and ethnically specific even when it is a version of cosmopolitan art music or pop music. Considering the popularity of mediated music with respect to its function, this music is regarded as heterogeneous and syncretized, because it is mass, urban, interclass music, i.e. a music of acculturation (Manuel 1988).

The history of early sound recording in Bulgaria and the creation of the Bulgarian sound recording industry can be traced in Fig. 1, which presents the basic periods and tendencies in the commercial recorded music during the first half of the twentieth century).

International (Trans-Boundary) Interactions: Foreigners' Role in Early Recorded Music in Bulgaria from the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century
During the first half of the twentieth century, many foreigners played an active role in

Bulgarian musical life (mostly in cities), working as individuals (musicians, singers, conductors, and music teachers) or in group formations (female café groups, saloon orchestras, tamboura groups, jazz orchestras for modern dance music, tavern and wedding orchestras).

- *Saloon Orchestras*

At the end of the nineteenth and in the beginning of the twentieth centuries, various groups of foreigners played in Sofia and in the major Bulgarian towns. Saloon orchestras from abroad (especially Serbia, Romania, and Czech lands) found work in the newly opened entertainment venues (such as restaurants, cafes, bars and beer-houses); some examples of such groups include a band led by the Serbian Vule Ninich (a virtuoso Gypsy violinist), an Italian band led by Hugo Ugolini, a band led by the Czech Shvertner, female orchestras of Hungarian and Austrian origins, known as "arfonistki" or harpists. Their repertoire was mixed, including overtures and melodies from operas and operettas, medleys of Bulgarian folk music, Balkan urban songs, Neapolitan canzonetti, Turkish *kyuchek* and *maaneta*, European dance music (including waltzes, quadrilles, polkas, and czardas). Some of these groups had recordings released by the Gramophone Company, such as the Shvertner's Czech Orchestra, the Hertsfeld Orchestra, and a Serbian orchestra with a choir, managed by Peter Velkov.

- *Tamboura Orchestras*

At the end of the nineteenth and in the beginning of the twentieth centuries, a tamboura orchestra made up of Bulgarians and foreigners dressed in folk costumes played in Sofia at the Batemberg Restaurant and Saloon and at the beer-house of Moris Ratz. Their repertoire included Viennese waltzes, military marches, and folk medleys. The first Bulgarian tamboura society recorded some performances on gramophones with the Gramophone Company in 1904 (Fig. 2).

- *Czech Bandmasters*

Some months after the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878, Czech musicians came from Prague to satisfy the needs of the growing army and administration of the new state. Later, those musicians became the bandmasters of the regimental orchestras that were founded in various Bulgarian towns, including Sofia, Russe, Varna, Sliven, Kyustendil, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Veliko Turnovo and Pleven (Valchinova-Chendova 2000: 85-89).

Naturally, the Bulgarian music composed by those Czech bandmasters had a hybrid character. The Czech musicians were not familiar with rural Bulgarian folk music. Thus, in their desire to create music with a Bulgarian character (related to local folk music), they took popular tunes from urban musical folklore, which often were of non-Bulgarian origin. The Bulgarian medleys composed by the Czechs were conglomerates of Bulgarian urban songs, altered to conform to the musical thinking that was typical for Czech music of the end of the nineteenth century (Valchev 2000: 186).

The music of the Life Guard Regiment (the first philharmonic orchestra in Bulgaria), managed by the Czech bandmaster Alois Matsak, was recorded in Sofia in 1905-1907. Some plates with their music were included in the catalog of the Gramophone Company in 1908. The works of Czech bandmasters (such as Matsak, Hanel and Novak) were per-

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formed by Bulgarian military bands and choirs and were recorded on gramophone plates during the following two decades.

• *Other Foreigners*

The Bulgarian gramophone plates from the second quarter of the twentieth century offer compositions and arrangements by Czechs, instrumental performances by Italians, vocal and instrumental performances by Russian immigrants, and vocal performances by Serbian singers.

On the gramophone plates produced by Bulgarian companies, one can find compositions and arrangements by Czech and Austrian composers and performers, for example: Franz Hanel, an Austrian violinist, author of Bulgarian medleys, and musician in saloon orchestras in various public houses in Sofia; Mechislav Hoermann, the conductor of the orchestra of the Odeon Operetta Theater; and Otto Libnih, a composer and pianist of Austrian descent who wrote and performed *shlageri* (popular tunes).

Russian musicians also played a role in Bulgarian musical life during the second quarter of the twentieth century; many "White Russian" emigrants fled to Bulgaria following the revolution and civil war in Russia in 1917. A number of them participated in recordings of popular music. The Braetsky Orchestra was managed by the pianist and composer Yurii Braetsky, who came to Bulgaria in 1923. Before founding his orchestra, Braetsky had played in the Novozhilov Jazz Orchestra, made up of Russians, which is said to have been the first serious jazz band in Bulgaria. One archival photograph shows Bratesky (at the piano), playing in the orchestra at the Stoychev Theatre in Sofia during the 1920s. Russian musicians participated in recordings of dance music made by Bulgarian bands (including groups such as Boris Leviev, Jazz Ovcharov, and the Odeon Theatre Orchestra), which accompanied singers on gramophone records. Bulgarian gramophone recordings also included performances by internationally acclaimed Russian choirs such as the Zharov Donkazashki Choir and Tsvetnov's Russian Choir.

In the beginning of the 1940s, many Serbian singers and groups (including Mitsa Plavazvezda, Mara Dzhordzhevich, and the Krnevats Orchestra) worked in Bulgaria and recorded Serbian songs, Macedonian songs, Bulgarian folk (rural and urban) songs, and popular songs for Bulgarian recording companies.

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In the early years of the twentieth century, foreigners introduced western styles and repertoires into Bulgarian recorded music. Some of the foreigners mixed western elements with local elements, creating hybrid musical products. Their compositions and arrangements were interpretations of Bulgarian urban and rural folk music, using the compositional techniques of Western European art music.

The attitude toward the participation of foreigners in the musical life of Bulgaria during that period was ambivalent. In the beginning they were a necessity, because they filled a natural void in Bulgarian cultural life and entertainment. Later, however, they were criticized for ideological and ethnic reasons. A possible explanation for this shift in attitude is the role played by the negation of foreign elements in the forming of one's own identity. This is the so-called "accordion effect," in which the formation and growing self-awareness of a nation is achieved through negation of Others. As a result, for-

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eigners were denied recognition of their place in the generation of musicians who constructed Bulgarian musical culture in the beginning of the twentieth century.

With their musical activities recorded on the first gramophone records in Bulgaria, these foreign musicians stand among the figures who established the leading divisions within the development of musical life in Bulgaria throughout the whole of the twentieth century. In terms of function, these divisions include amateur and professional music making, which developed in both "high" and "low" public spaces. In terms of musical content, the hybridization processes catalyzed by foreigner musicians penetrated into the spheres of art, pop and folk music.

Interethnic/Transethnic Interactions: The Role of Minorities in Bulgarian Recorded Music from the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Interethnic, pan-Balkan interactions in music were an important determining factor for Bulgarian audiences' musical tastes in the beginning of the twentieth century. The elite strata in Sofia listened to Caruso along with gramophone plates of Turkish *sharkii*; the rural audience in the Plovdiv region — Bulgarians and Gypsies alike — enjoyed the sound of the gramophone in the tavern, playing Bulgarian *hora* and Turkish *maaneta*; the catalogs of the Gramophone Company for the Bulgarian market had some other sections, in addition to the "Bulgarian" one — "Serbian," "Romanian," and "Turkish" (Dimov 2003a, 2005b, 2005c).

There are many recorded performances of musicians from various ethnic groups living in Bulgaria (including Gypsies, Turks, Jews, Armenians, etc.). My attention here is focused on the representatives of those ethnic groups that had the most considerable impact on the hybridization processes in recorded music: Gypsies and Jews.

• Jewish Musicians and Music

A large part of the recorded music in the first half of the twentieth century was made with the creative contribution of composers and arrangers who were ethnic Jews. Pantcho Vladigerov, one of the most famous Bulgarian composers of art music, for instance, was of partially Jewish origin. In 1928 in Berlin, Vladigerov, along with his brother Lyuben, recorded a series of their works performed by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Orchestra of the National Opera in Berlin. He also recorded a sequence of plates with his works for the Polydor/Gramophone and Linstrom-Parlophone companies. As a pianist, he accompanied recordings of Bulgarian folk and popular songs performed by singers such as Alexander Kraev, Maria Tsarigradska, and Albert Pinkas for companies such as Polydor, Columbia, and Ultrafon (Klosterman 2000: 81-84).

Among the most popular composers of recorded Bulgarian dance music were Milyo Basan and Boris Leviev. As leaders of dance and operetta orchestras, in the 1920s they began to introduce popular western dance music in Bulgaria by arranging and recording for Bulgarian gramophone companies. They composed songs and accompanied the recordings of some of the most famous Bulgarian singers of that time (Basan 1972).

During the 1920s, some Jewish singers from Bulgaria began to make records for western gramophone companies. Tenor Albert Pinkas, called "the angelic voice" during the 1930s, is the first of "the great trio of Bulgarian tenors, who paved the way for hundreds

of songs, which they presented to the world during their time" (Kaufmann 2002b: 13). Pinkas is usually labeled as a singer of popular tunes, but his style goes beyond the boundaries of popular dance music. His repertoire is a conglomerate of translated popular western dance tunes, popular music created by Bulgarian composers in a western style, local hybrids of western and eastern styles, Bulgarian urban folk songs, and Russian songs. Hybridism was typical for a major part of that repertoire, especially the part including local idioms (such as urban folklore and oriental intonations).

• *Gypsy/Roma Musicians and Music*

Gramophone plates containing performances of Gypsy musicians from the first quarter of the twentieth century are a rarity. From that time there is a plate (dated 1911) called "Sofiyski Cigani Gaidari" ("Gypsy Bagpipers from Sofia"), which is stored in the Golden Collection of the Bulgarian National Radio.

Since the mid-1920s, dozens of musicians of Gypsy origin participated in the sound recording industry, mainly as performers of Bulgarian folk music (Peycheva 1999:116-117). The only exception is Atanas Sotirov (known as "The Golden Gypsy Boy"), a violinist and band leader, who recorded a repertoire of saloon and operetta music and accompanied opera singers during the 1920s and 1930s. Many Gypsy musicians were among the members of some of the most popular orchestras from the 1930s and 1940s, which recorded instrumental folk music and accompanied the recordings of folk singers (Fig. 3). Although they recorded rural folk music, the Gypsy bands included western instruments (such as flugelhorn, clarinet, accordion, violin, contrabass, etc.). In some of the recorded plates of individual music, there are Gypsy musicians performing on traditional rural folk instruments such as the bagpipe and ocarina.

In the early 1930s, a Gypsy cabaret was founded in the Konyovitsa quarter of Sofia, where a singer from the Vidin region called Keva began to sing. She became famous and subsequently began recording popular and folk songs for Bulgarian gramophone companies. The famous violinist and band leader Peyo Budakov also has many recordings on gramophone plates as a singer. He recorded mainly Bulgarian folk, Macedonian, Serbian and Bosnian urban songs. A curious aspect of the image of this violinist-singer that emphasizes his musical hybridism is the fact that as the leader of an accompanying orchestra, he recorded many duets with famous singers of Bulgarian folk music of his time (including Atanaska Todorova and Boris Mashalov). The most popular singer at fairs between the 1920s and 1950s, Parush Parushev, who also made dozens of gramophone plate recordings, is also of Gypsy origin. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s, many Gypsy musicians continued to record Bulgarian folk music for the state record company, Radioprom.

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An examination of Bulgarian gramophone plates from the first half of the twentieth century leads to the following conclusions about the role of ethnic groups in the process of musical hybridization:

1. In the nineteenth century, the intercultural interactions in the multi-ethnic Balkan town created a collection of Balkan musical intonations. Among its active builders were representatives of various minorities.

2. There is much sound evidence that provides examples of musical hybridization, which developed with the participation of musicians from different ethnic groups from Bulgaria. Gypsies and Turks contributed to the development of Bulgarian folk music, as well as of their own folk musics, while Jews and Armenians contributed to the development of Bulgarian pop music.

3. According to the gramophone plate evidence, recordings of minority musicians covered all musical genres, including art music, popular music and folk music.

4. Gypsy musicians were the main bearers of interethnic and inter-Balkan elements in recorded folk music. It is only in their recordings that one can find such a wide scope of idioms from the traditional musics of the Bulgarian people.

Conclusion

Early commercial sound recordings represent the modernization of traditional music from Bulgaria. The Bulgarian case of early commercial recordings is located in the hybrid spaces of the globalizing world of the musical industry (a boundary zone between the East and the West, the urbanization processes in a rural country, urban musicians in a rural environment, ethnically mixed audiences, and the co-existence of "mixed times" — i.e. pre-modern and post-modern).

Early commercial recordings from Bulgaria represent both a unified phenomenon, as well as the development of a variety of different musics. Hybridism is a relevant feature of recorded music in Bulgaria even at the level of the music's nature: micro-variants of macro-musics, sub-cultural sounds in the super-cultural landscape of the global musical industry, and intercultural interactions.

Such musical hybridism is concordant with the tastes of the audience. Recorded music, which was not "pure," was sought out, purchased and listened to, because according to the concepts and tastes of urban audience in Bulgaria during the first half of the twentieth century, the mixed elements were an essential expression of "one's own" elements. The mixed elements naturally contain differences, but what is different was not necessarily comprehended as foreign or somebody else's and was not always negatively valenced. I even came across a gramophone plate with mixed music on it: one side is a Bulgarian *horo* melody, whereas the other side is a Turkish *kyuchek* melody. Such a mix is perfectly natural because when celebrating, people used to listen to and dance both *rachenitsa* and *kyuchek*.

Furthermore, all participants in the recording industry from the first half of the twentieth century were personifications of musical hybridism. This was a result of their (at least) bi-cultural characters and their permanent inter-ethnicity; they were mostly born in one ethnic-cultural environment, yet they had to realize themselves in another. At the same time, in the musical profession and in the field of applied media music in particular, they played the role of mediators between the foreign and the native, the external and the local, the western and the eastern, the traditional and the innovated.

The figures who embody the hybridization in recorded music (namely, bandmasters, composers and arrangers, instrumentalists, and singers) changed their profile during the first half of the twentieth century. During the first two decades of the century, when the

first recordings were being made and the gramophone was still available only for the urban elite, the leading role in the hybridization processes was played by foreigners. In the years between the two world wars, when the Bulgarian musical industry began to develop in the form of local companies, and when gramophone and radio apparatuses became widespread in both towns and villages, the leading role in the processes of musical hybridization was shared between ethnic Bulgarian musicians and representatives of different minorities.

When speaking about hybridization today, we associate it with actual phenomena such as globalization (Pieterse 2006) and world music. Some attempts are made to put hybridization at the basis of the future "music of the world," as a music of mixing that interweaves various styles, genres, and traditions and that crosses ethnic and national boundaries. In fact, the predicted alternative of tomorrow and today's hybridization could both be interpreted as continuations of a process visible in early recorded music from the first half of the twentieth century, of which the examples from Bulgaria provide a good illustration.

Notes:

¹ This paper is part of a larger research project that the author has undertaken over the past several years as part of an individual research project at the Institute of Arts Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences entitled "Traditional and Popular Mediated Music from Bulgaria in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: People and Images" (2004-2006) and as part of a Bulgarian-Finnish research project "Traditional and Popular Music on Records and in Broadcasting in the Twentieth Century" (2005-2007). I would like to take this opportunity to thank specialists who in one way or another (whether it be through sharing music, information, literature, expert knowledge, or methodological assistance) have helped me in my work on this project: Pekka Gronow, Director of the Sound Archive at the Finnish National Radio (YLE); Vesa Kurkela of Sibelius Academy in Helsinki; Risto Pekka Pennanen (Finland); Franz Lechleitner of the Vienna Phonogram Archive (Austria); Larry Weiner (USA); and Zahari Milenkov from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at Sofia University (Bulgaria). Interim results of this research have been published in Bulgarian academic journals (see Dimov 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2005d; 2006).

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